



(12) **United States Patent**
Lahey et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,207,887 B1**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Dec. 8, 2015**

(54) **PRESENTATION OF PREDICTED STEPS IN A PRINT WORKFLOW**

USPC 358/1.15, 1.13, 1.14, 1.9, 1.16;
709/203, 223; 382/128, 167, 314;
714/E11.002, 57

See application file for complete search history.

(71) Applicants: **Leonard Corning Lahey**, Boulder, CO (US); **Linda Sue Liebelt**, Boulder, CO (US); **Robert Patrick Smyth**, Thornton, CO (US); **Marquis G. Waller**, Beverly, OH (US); **Scott Thomas Ziegler**, Boulder, CO (US)

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

6,239,802	B1 *	5/2001	Lahey et al.	715/810
6,345,288	B1 *	2/2002	Reed et al.	709/201
6,384,923	B1 *	5/2002	Lahey	358/1.13
6,407,820	B1 *	6/2002	Hansen et al.	358/1.12
6,411,314	B1 *	6/2002	Hansen et al.	715/769
6,725,428	B1	4/2004	Pareschi et al.	
8,195,321	B2	6/2012	Mackelprang et al.	
8,555,206	B2	10/2013	Pederson et al.	
8,635,623	B2 *	1/2014	Sekine et al.	718/104
8,639,645	B2	1/2014	Deshpande et al.	

(Continued)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

(72) Inventors: **Leonard Corning Lahey**, Boulder, CO (US); **Linda Sue Liebelt**, Boulder, CO (US); **Robert Patrick Smyth**, Thornton, CO (US); **Marquis G. Waller**, Beverly, OH (US); **Scott Thomas Ziegler**, Boulder, CO (US)

(73) Assignee: **Ricoh Company, Ltd.**, Tokyo (JP)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

Avanti slingshot. http://www.avantisystems.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Avanti-Slingshot-brochure_Sept2013.pdf.

(Continued)

(21) Appl. No.: **14/481,517**

Primary Examiner — Negussie Worku

(22) Filed: **Sep. 9, 2014**

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Duft Bornsen & Fettig LLP

(51) **Int. Cl.**

G06F 3/12 (2006.01)
G06K 15/00 (2006.01)
G06K 15/02 (2006.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

System and methods for presentation of predicted steps in a print workflow. One embodiment is a system that identifies a print workflow with interconnected steps of multiple potential paths. The system identifies a print job, generates a copy of the print job, and simulates execution a step in the print workflow with the copy of the print job. The execution comprises: determining whether the step includes conditional branching, and, when the step includes conditional branching, predicting a subsequent step by evaluating conditions of the step against property values of the copy of the print job. The execution also comprises updating the property values based on the execution of the step. The system repeats the execution for each subsequently predicted step to predict a path of the print job. The system includes a graphical user interface to display the path that is predicted for the print job in the print workflow.

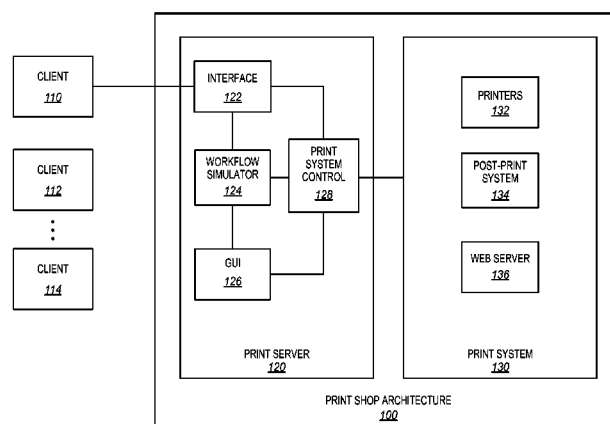
(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **G06F 3/1208** (2013.01); **G06F 3/1211** (2013.01); **G06F 3/1256** (2013.01); **G06F 3/1258** (2013.01); **G06F 3/1275** (2013.01); **G06K 15/005** (2013.01); **G06K 15/1809** (2013.01); **G06K 15/1823** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G06F 3/1275; G06F 3/1285; G06F 3/126; G06F 3/1243; G06F 3/1296; G06F 3/1211; G06F 3/1259; G06F 3/1238; G06F 3/129; G06F 2206/1512; G06F 3/1241; G06F 8/34; H04N 1/00408

18 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



(56)

References Cited

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

8,769,127 B2 * 7/2014 Selimis et al. 709/229
 2010/0115445 A1 5/2010 Jambor-Sadeghi
 2010/0169142 A1 7/2010 Hinton et al.
 2012/0054095 A1 * 3/2012 Lesandro et al. 705/39
 2012/0212769 A1 * 8/2012 Gaertner et al. 358/1.15
 2013/0208315 A1 8/2013 Zeng et al.
 2013/0293926 A1 11/2013 Giannetti et al.
 2014/0007127 A1 1/2014 Amir et al.
 2014/0240745 A1 * 8/2014 Boldt et al. 358/1.14

2014/0240754 A1 * 8/2014 Smyth et al. 358/1.15
 2015/0135214 A1 * 5/2015 Reisman 725/37

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Business workflow explorer. Embedded processes (SAP business workflow). http://help.sap.com/saphelp_erp60_sp/helpdata/en/c5/e4a957453d11d189430000e829fbbd/content.htm?frameset=/en/0b/a7f042011f11d3a6500060087a79ea/frameset.htm See highlighted portions.

* cited by examiner

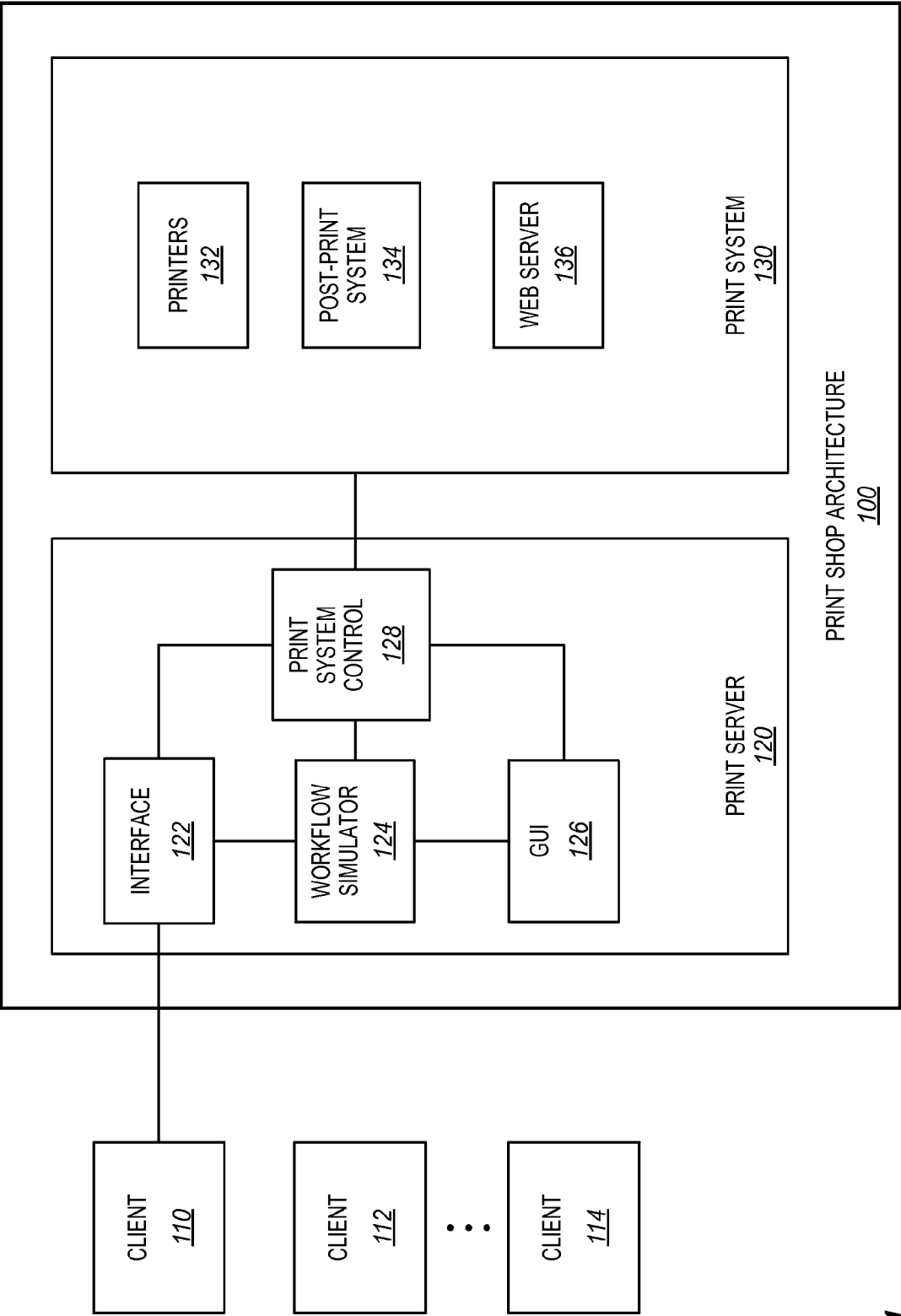


FIG. 1

FIG. 2

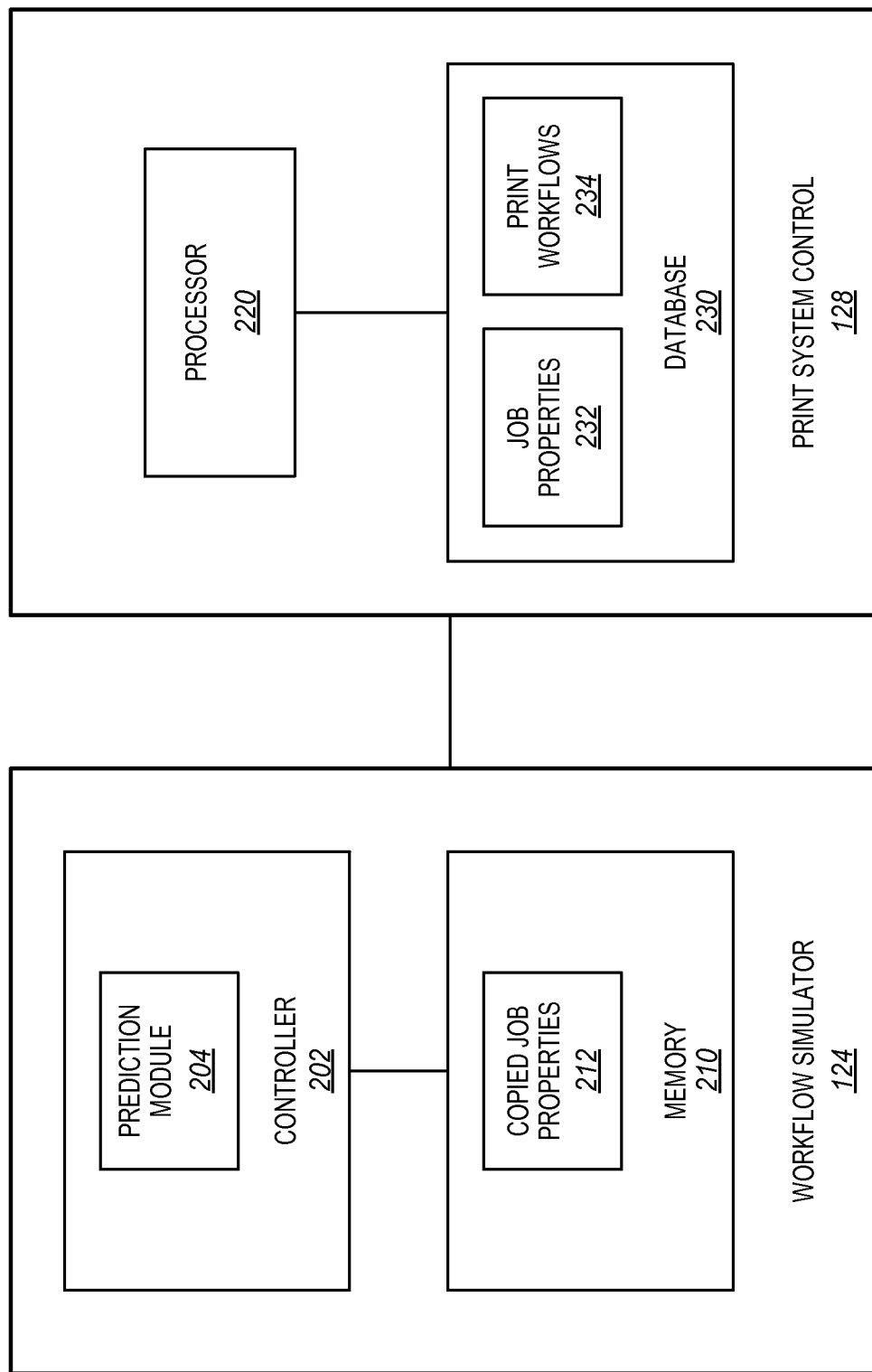


FIG. 3

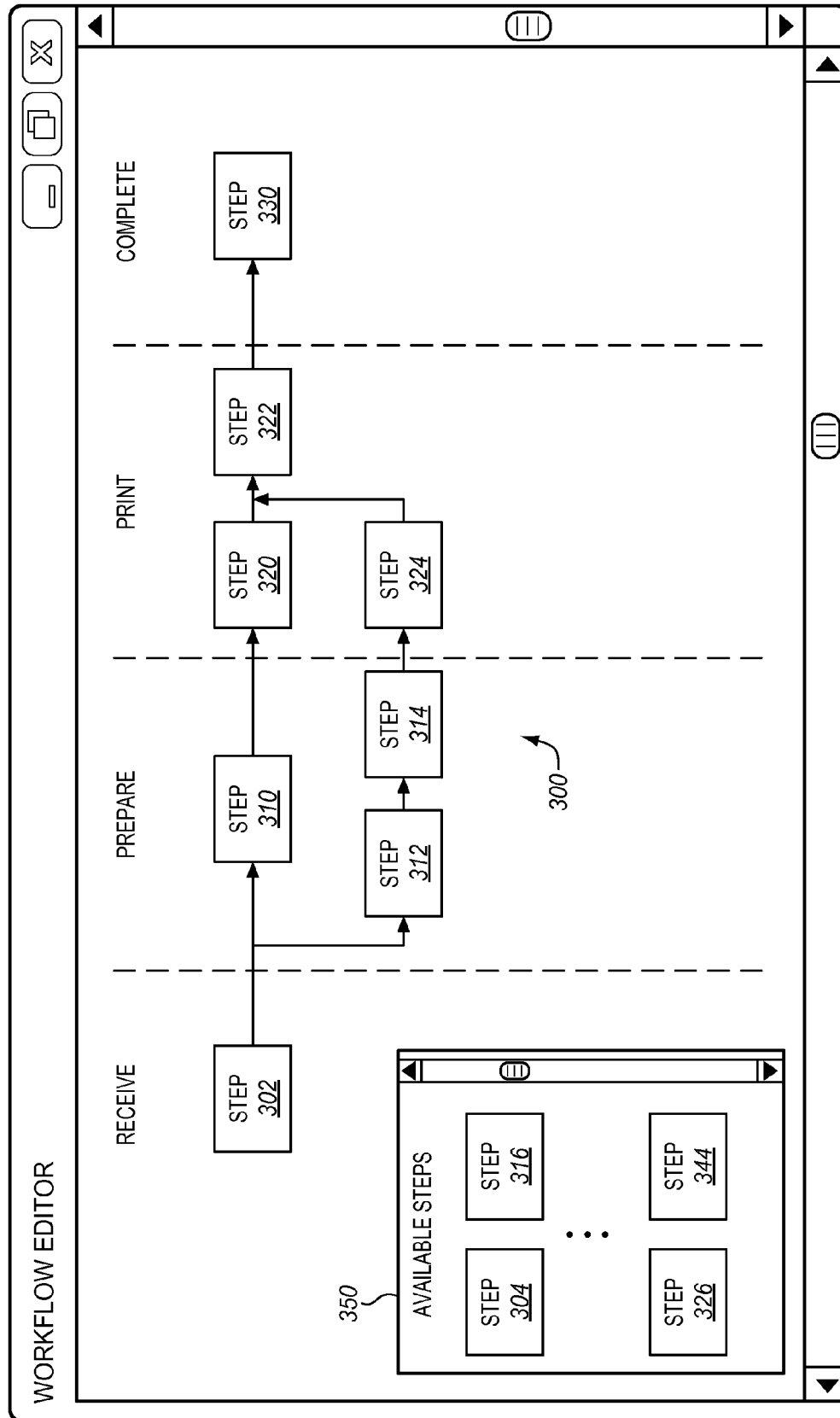
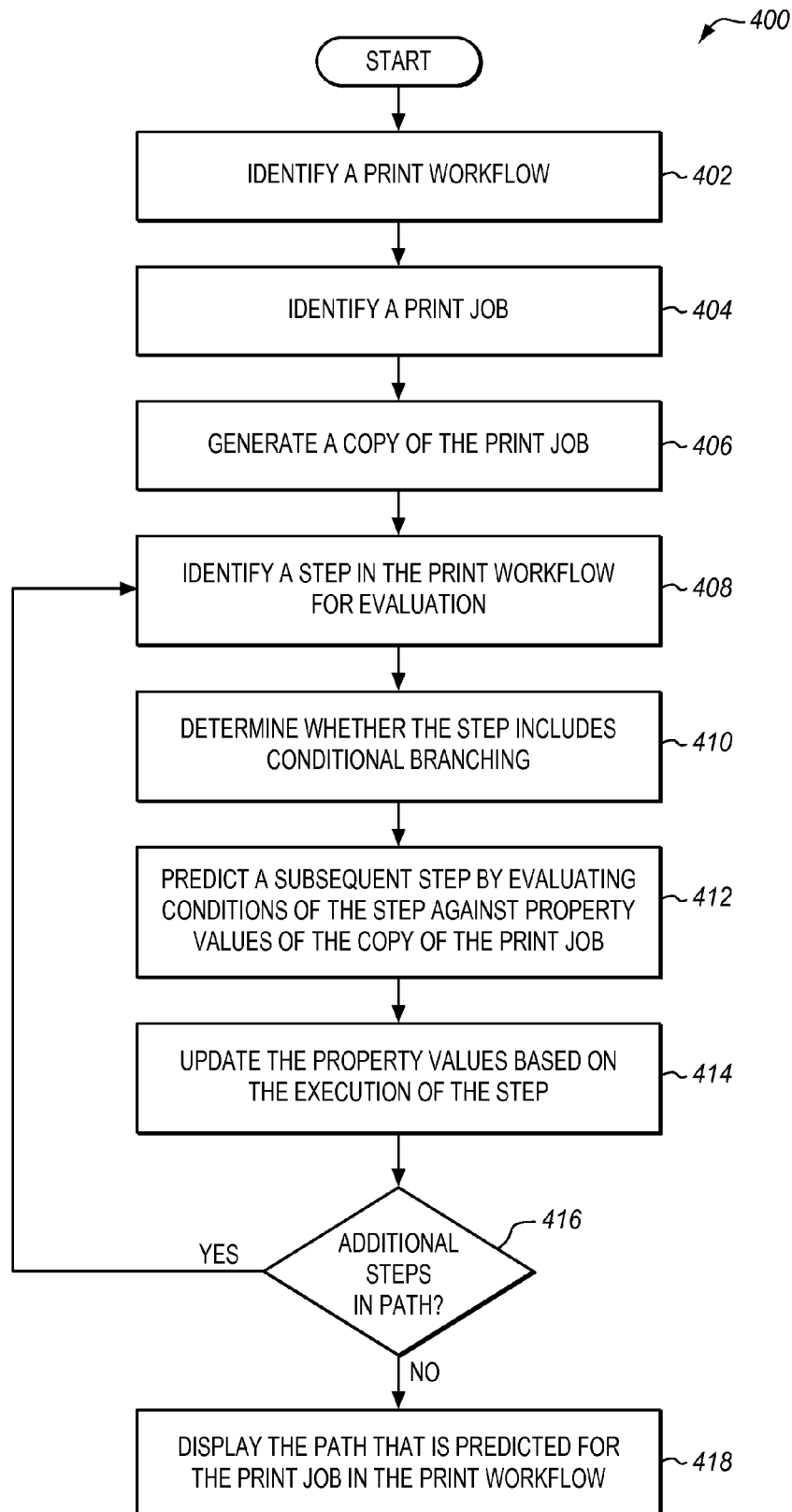


FIG. 4

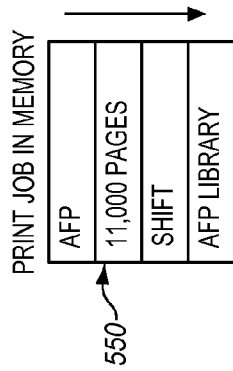


FIG. 5

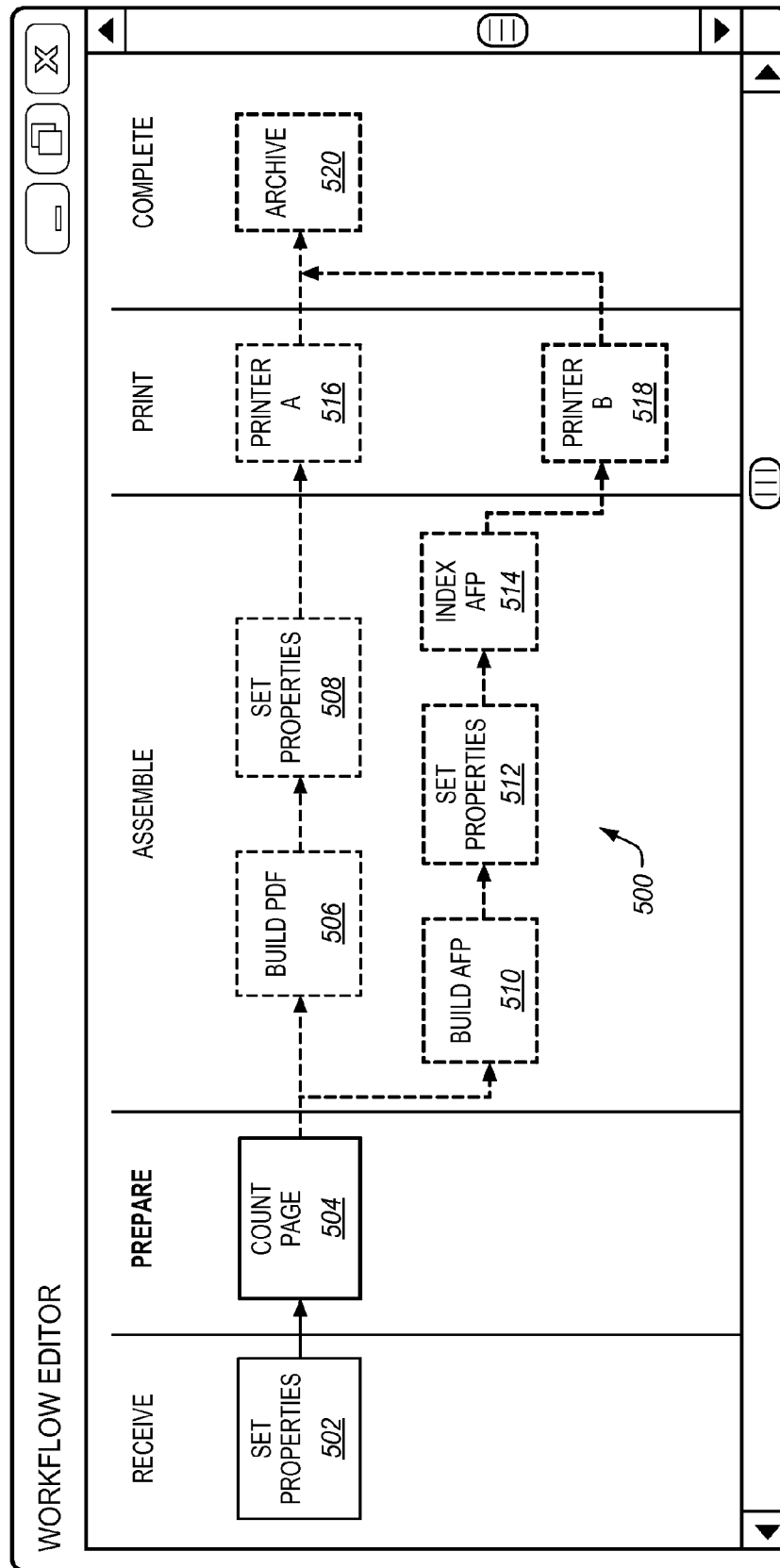


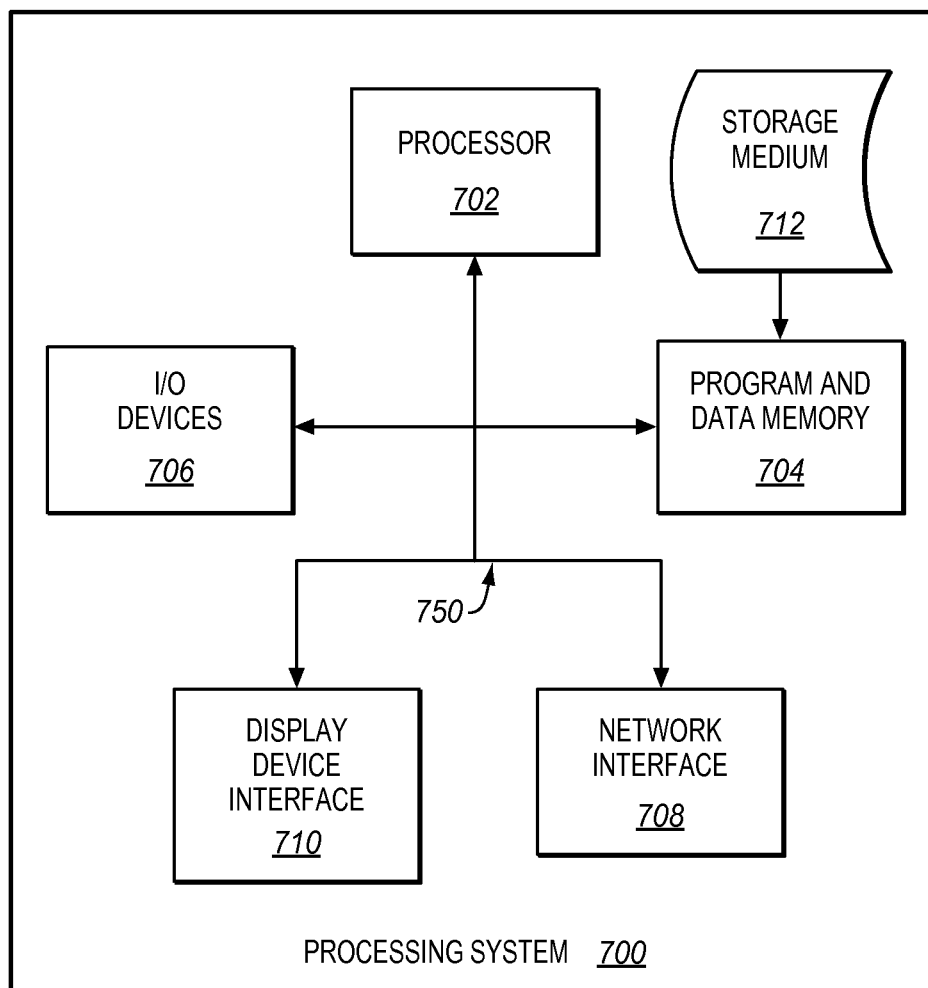
FIG. 6

600 →

STEP EDITOR

STEP	PHASE	CONDITIONS	DURATION	UNIT 1	FOR EVERY	UNIT 2
<input type="checkbox"/> SET PROPERTIES <u>502</u>	RECEIVE	HOLD	10	MIN	1	JOB(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> COUNT PAGE <u>504</u>	PREPARE		3	SEC	1	JOB(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILD PDF <u>506</u>	ASSEMBLE	IF PDF	25	SEC	1000	KILOBYTE(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> SET PROPERTIES <u>508</u>	ASSEMBLE		10	SEC	1	JOB(S)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILD AFP <u>510</u>	ASSEMBLE	ELSE	20	SEC	1000	KILOBYTE(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> SET PROPERTIES <u>512</u>	ASSEMBLE	SHIFT IMAGE	20	SEC	1000	KILOBYTE(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> INDEX AFP <u>514</u>	ASSEMBLE	AFP LIBRARY	30	SEC	1	JOB(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> PRINTER A <u>516</u>	PRINT	IF < 10,000 PAGE	1	HOURL	1	JOB(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> PRINTER B <u>518</u>	PRINT	IF > 10,000 PAGE	1.5	HOURL	1	JOB(S)
<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHIVE <u>520</u>	COMPLETE	RETAIN	30	SEC	1	JOB(S)

☒ DURATION TO: ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 2 HR, 10 MIN, 35 SEC

FIG. 7

1

PRESENTATION OF PREDICTED STEPS IN A PRINT WORKFLOW

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates to the field of printing systems and, in particular, to print workflows.

BACKGROUND

A print shop handles the production and organization of documents on a large scale. For example, in addition to receiving and processing large print jobs (e.g., hundreds or thousands of documents) from a plurality of clients for printing on high-speed printers, a print shop may include a number of modules that perform post-print handling such as inserting and mailing of the documents. Because of this enhanced functionality, print shops are useful for numerous high-volume printing applications such as mass-mail printing of time sensitive statements and bills.

Each print job sent to the print shop is associated with a print workflow, which is an ordered set of activities to perform at the print shop to transform the electronic data of the print job into a deliverable physical product for a customer. A typical workflow includes a series of steps, for example, "pre-flighting" the print job to check for errors, rendering the print job, physically printing and drying the print job, proofing the printed job, generating billing for a customer, shipping, and removing the print job from the system. Because print jobs typically request different types of processing, the specific workflow associated with a given print job may vary on a job-by-job basis.

SUMMARY

Embodiments described herein provide for presentation of predicted steps in a print workflow. A print job is simulated in a print workflow in order to predict a series of subsequent steps in the print workflow that have yet to be performed for the print job. The display of the projected path of the print job based on its current job properties enables a user to foresee an anticipated outcome of the print job and therefore determine whether any changes to the print job are desired before the print job is actually processed through the print workflow.

One embodiment is a system that includes a controller configured to identify a print workflow. The print workflow includes interconnected steps that perform processing tasks for print jobs. At least one of the steps includes conditional branching of multiple potential paths for print jobs through the print workflow. The controller is also configured to identify a print job, to generate a copy of the print job, and to simulate an execution of a step in the print workflow with the copy of the print job. The execution comprises: determining whether the step includes conditional branching, and, when the step includes conditional branching, predicting a subsequent step by evaluating conditions of the step against copied job properties of the print job. The execution also comprises updating the copied job properties based on the execution of the step. The controller is also configured to repeat the execution for each subsequently predicted step in the print workflow in order to predict a path of the print job in the print workflow. The system also includes a graphical user interface (GUI) configured to display the path that is predicted for the print job in the print workflow.

The above summary provides a basic understanding of some aspects of the specification. This summary is not an extensive overview of the specification. It is not intended to

2

identify key or critical elements of the specification nor to delineate any scope of particular embodiments of the specification, or any scope of the claims. Its sole purpose is to present some concepts of the specification in a simplified form as a prelude to the more detailed description that is presented later. Other exemplary embodiments (e.g., methods and computer-readable media relating to the foregoing embodiments) may be described below.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Some embodiments of the present invention are now described, by way of example only, and with reference to the accompanying drawings. The same reference number represents the same element or the same type of element on all drawings.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a print shop architecture **100** in an exemplary embodiment.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a workflow simulator and print system control in an exemplary embodiment.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating a Graphical User Interface (GUI) for generating and editing a print workflow in an exemplary embodiment.

FIG. 4 is a flowchart illustrating a method for operating a print workflow simulator in an exemplary embodiment.

FIG. 5 is illustrates a GUI of a predicted workflow in an exemplary embodiment.

FIG. 6 illustrates a GUI for editing steps of a print workflow in an exemplary embodiment.

FIG. 7 illustrates a processing system operable to execute a computer readable medium embodying programmed instructions to perform desired functions in an exemplary embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The figures and the following description illustrate specific exemplary embodiments. It will thus be appreciated that those skilled in the art will be able to devise various arrangements that, although not explicitly described or shown herein, embody the principles of the embodiments and are included within the scope of the embodiments. Furthermore, any examples described herein are intended to aid in understanding the principles of the embodiments, and are to be construed as being without limitation to such specifically recited examples and conditions. As a result, the inventive concept(s) is not limited to the specific embodiments or examples described below, but by the claims and their equivalents.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a print shop architecture **100** in an exemplary embodiment. The print shop architecture **100** includes a print server **120**, which functionally connects one or more clients **110-114** to objects in a print system **130**. Clients **110-114** may be servers or software applications used by print shop customers that submit print data and job tickets to the print server **120**.

The print server **120** includes print system control **128** operable to generate/receive print workflows for incoming print jobs and to manage objects within the print system **130** accordingly. The print server **120** also includes a workflow simulator **124** that is operable to perform a simulation of a print job through a print workflow. An interface **122** provides communication between the clients **110-114** and the print server **120**. In order to aid an operator of the print shop in creating a print workflow for a print job, a Graphical User Interface (GUI) **126** is provided for manipulation of print workflows.

The print system **130** includes the devices and components of the print shop that perform print shop activities. For instance, the print system **130** may include one or more printers **132** for transforming print data onto a suitable printable medium, a post-print system **134** for performing various post-print operations, such as cutting, stapling, folding, inserting, mailing, shipping, etc., and a web server **136** for generating emails, web content, etc. Objects of the print system **130** may exist within the confines of the print shop itself, or may comprise off-site devices and functional components managed by the print server **120**, and may further include manual tasks performed by personnel.

Additional details of the print server **120** are described with respect to FIG. **2**. FIG. **2** is a block diagram illustrating print system control **128** and workflow simulator **124** in an exemplary embodiment. The print system control **128** includes processor **220** that identifies and manages available activities of the print system **130**. Certain print shop activities may be logically related with each other so that they have order and dependency relationships. Moreover, certain activities may be prioritized, altered or may be required or optional based upon specific clients, customers, or information in a job ticket of the print job. These logical relationships and workflow rules are defined in what is referred to as a print workflow.

FIG. **3** is a block diagram illustrating a graphical user interface (e.g., GUI **126** of print server **120**) for generating and editing a print workflow **300** in an exemplary embodiment. A user may drag-and-drop available steps **350** (e.g., activities of print system **130**) into phases (e.g., Receive, Prepare, Print, Complete) and make logical connections between the steps to form a print workflow **300**. Each phase may include a step or sequence of steps that perform a logical set of actions in the print system **130**. In general, each step receives input, processes the input based on rules/parameters configured for that step, and forwards a generated output to the next step in the sequence. A step may include logic that indicates conditions to be satisfied before (or after) that step is performed.

The print workflow **300** shows an exemplary grid of interconnected steps configured such that a print job may take one of multiple potential conditional branches or paths, sometimes referred to as a non-linear print workflow. For instance, a print job may be processed according to a first path that includes steps **302**, **310**, **320**, **322**, and **330**, or alternatively may be processed according to a second path that includes steps **302**, **312**, **314**, **324**, **322**, and **330**. Decisions regarding the particular path that is taken in the print workflow may be based on job properties associated with the particular print job being processed in the print workflow. For example, a print job may proceed to be processed at step **310** if it exceeds 10,000 pages, otherwise the print job may proceed to be processed at step **312**. As shown in the print workflow **300**, a conditional branch (e.g., the decision to proceed to step **310** or step **312**) may alter the sequence of steps performed in subsequent phases. Rules, sequencing, conditional branching, etc., of the steps may be configured by matter of design choice, although some steps may be associated with a specific phase.

Returning to FIG. **2**, the processor **220** of the print system control **128** allows a user to generate print workflows **234**. Database **230** stores print workflows **234** along with job properties **232** of print jobs received from clients **110-114**. Job properties define the characteristics of print jobs and control aspects of job processing and printing. Generally, job properties for a print job may change during workflow processing of the print job. For example, PDL (Page Description Language) print data is rasterized into bitmaps and/or sheetsides,

job tickets are updated with information regarding insert sheets, which type of media to use, etc. Thus, job properties may be set in a variety of ways, such as with configured parameters of a print workflow when a print job is processing, with print data sent with the print job, or via an administrator on a job-by-job basis.

In operation, the processor **220** executes steps of a print workflow and updates or adds job properties **232** in the database **230** for the print job being processed. The print workflows **234** may vary in accordance with customer or print shop needs, and therefore each print workflow may include a unique network of conditional branches and rules. Due to the variety of possible workflow paths and potential changes to job properties it is difficult for users to determine whether a print job will be completed on time and without errors unless and until the print job is actually processed through the print workflow.

The print server **120** is therefore enhanced with workflow simulator **124** that is operable to perform a simulation of a print job through a print workflow. The controller **202** receives/retrieves information of a print job and generates a "mock" print job internally with similar or matching job properties that are stored as copied job properties **212** in memory **210**. The controller **202** includes a prediction module **204** that processes the copied job properties **212** through a print workflow to predict steps in the print workflow that have yet to be actually performed on the original print job. The prediction module **204** evaluates individual steps in the print workflow and updates the copied job properties **212** in memory **210** accordingly (e.g., runs each step in the print workflow as the print job would to get updated property values). The prediction module **204** therefore accurately predicts a path of the print job step-by-step because each step is evaluated with copied job properties **212** that have been appropriately processed and updated by the step that precedes it.

The prediction module **204** advantageously processes the copied job properties **212** in memory **210** without affecting the job properties **232** of the print job that are stored in the database **230**. The prediction module **204** is communicatively coupled with a display device (e.g., GUI **126**) to display the predicted path, thereby enabling a user to see the remaining steps (and/or steps already taken) for the print job. The information displayed to the user facilitates scheduling and print workflow assessment and allows for anticipation of any changes to be made in the system to ensure deadlines are met and print jobs are processed efficiently.

FIG. **4** is a flow chart illustrating a method **400** for operating a workflow simulator **124** in an exemplary embodiment. The steps of the method **400** will be described with respect to the print server **120** of FIG. **1**, although one skilled in the art will understand that method **400** may be performed by other systems not shown. The steps of the method **400** described herein are not all inclusive and may include other steps not shown. The steps for the flow charts shown herein may also be performed in an alternative order.

At step **402**, the controller **202** identifies a print workflow in the database **230**. At step **404**, the controller **202** identifies a print job in the database **230**. A print job may be associated with a particular print workflow to direct the processing of the print job. For example, a print job and a print workflow may each be associated with a job type, and a value of the job type determines the particular print workflow the print job receives when moving through the system.

At step **406**, the controller **202** generates a copy of the print job. In one embodiment, the controller **202** accesses the database **230** and duplicates job properties **232** of the print job

5

stored in database **230** to memory **210** as copied job properties **212**. The job properties **232** reflect a current processing status of the print job in the print workflow. In other words, the job properties **232** may reflect values set by the client that sent the print job (e.g., if no steps of the print workflow have executed), or alternatively, the job properties **232** may have been set/updated by processor **220** (e.g., one or more steps of the print workflow have executed).

At step **408**, the controller **202** identifies a step in the print workflow for evaluation. In one embodiment, the controller **202** identifies a current step in the print workflow that is being executed for the print job. For example, if the processor **220** is currently executing, but has not completed a step in the print workflow, the controller **202** may identify that step for evaluation. Alternatively, the controller **202** may identify the first step to be performed as defined in the configuration of the print workflow.

At step **410**, the controller **202** determines whether the step includes conditional branching. If the step includes conditional logic which branches print jobs into multiple potential paths, the controller **202** predicts a subsequent step in the print workflow by evaluating conditions of the step against the values of the copied job properties **212**, in step **412**. If the step does not include such conditional logic, the controller **202** predicts a subsequent step by identifying the adjacently connected step defined in the configuration of the print workflow.

At step **414**, the controller **202** updates the copied job properties **212** based on execution of the step. For example, regardless as to whether the step includes conditional logic which branches print jobs into multiple potential paths, the step may include rules which set or update properties and/or property values of the print job. Thus, the controller **202** evaluates processing rules/parameters that are configured for that step and updates the copied job properties **212** accordingly. This ensures appropriate evaluation of a subsequently predicted step (e.g., step identified in step **412**) due to any updates/changes to job properties as a result of the preceding step.

In step **416**, the controller **202** determines whether there are additional steps to be evaluated. For example, the controller **202** may determine that a terminal step in the print workflow has been evaluated and there are no subsequent steps. Or, the controller **202** may determine that the most recently evaluated step contains impermissible values that trigger an error condition. In any case, if there are no subsequent steps, the method **400** proceeds to step **418**, and the controller **202** directs a display device (e.g., GUI **126**) to display the path that is predicted for the print job in the print workflow. Otherwise, if there are additional subsequent steps, the controller **202** repeats steps **408-416** on the subsequently predicted step (e.g., the step predicted in step **412**).

As each step is evaluated in the method **400**, a path is formed comprised of a series of consecutive steps which are likely to be executed in the future for transformation of a print job into a deliverable product for a customer. The predicted path alerts a user to any problems which might arise for processing a print job well before it is processed in the print system **130**. Thus, appropriate changes may be made to the print job or print workflow in advance to increase efficiency, meet deadlines, or avoid errors. Additionally, the controller **202** may re-simulate a print job through a print workflow with any user-applied changes in memory **210** (e.g., changes to copied job properties **212**, print workflow, individual step, etc.) so that a determination as to whether the hypothetical changes may improve processing in the print workflow with-

6

out affecting any processing being performed on the print job by the processor **220** from the database **230**.

In one embodiment, each step that is evaluated by the controller **202** is associated with an assigned duration value. The controller **202** sums the duration value of each step included in the predicted path of the print job to determine an estimated completion time for the print job. The steps may be assigned duration values via a user interface or based on collected statistical data of past use. In another embodiment, the controller **202** directs a GUI to visually display a configuration of the print workflow such that the path and steps that the print job is predicted to take (and/or not to take) in the print workflow are identified graphically. Additionally, the path and steps that the print job has already taken in the print workflow may also be graphically identified. Such graphical indications may include use of various different colors, line widths, line dashes, or other types of visual notifications.

In another embodiment, one or more of the steps evaluated by the controller **202** may be configured to perform activities that run an external program or activity. If the controller **202** determines that an external resource is to be created in accordance with the processing conditions of the step, then the controller **202** may skip evaluation of the step, though the controller **202** may still take into account any assigned duration values associated with the skipped step. In yet another embodiment, the controller **202** is configured to direct display of the predicted path substantially in real time. Thus, the controller **202** need not wait to determine a terminal step of a predicted path before displaying the path. As such, a visual graphic of the predicted path may be presented as the controller **202** simulates the print job in the print workflow.

In another embodiment, the controller **202** tracks information of multiple print jobs (and/or multiple simulated print jobs) with respect to an individual step. For example, the controller **202** may enable a user to select a step in a print workflow and view how each of a plurality of print jobs were predicted to arrive at that step. Such information may be used to identify and correct bottlenecks in the print system **130**. For instance, a step that is to have several print jobs arrive in or near the same time period may be identified so that processing delays are avoided. Changes to the print workflow, step rules, or hardware (e.g., more printers) may be made such that process improvements are realized.

Examples

In the following examples, additional processes, systems, and methods are described in the context of a workflow system for a print shop. Specifically, FIGS. **5-6** are block diagrams illustrating a GUI (e.g., GUI **126**) of a predicted print workflow **500** in an exemplary embodiment. Assume, for the sake of this example, that the processor **220** has received a print job in the Advanced Function Presentation (AFP) print format (e.g., element **550**), has stored the print job and related job properties in database **232**, and has assigned the print job to print workflow **500** for processing in accordance with steps **502-520**.

Further assume for this example that the processor **220** has initiated processing of the print job and has completed execution of step **502** in the Receive phase and that the print job is currently being processed in accordance with step **504** in the Prepare phase. In this example, bolded solid lines indicate the path that the print job has already traveled, the currently executing step (e.g., step **504**), and the current phase of the print job in the print workflow **500** (e.g., Prepare phase).

In response to a user input to view a predicted path of for the print job, the controller **202** of the workflow simulator **124**

copies job properties of the print job (e.g., element **550**) from the database **230** to memory **210**. The controller **202** communicates with processor **220** or accesses database **230** to determine a current step in the print workflow **500** which has not yet completed execution. In this case, the controller **202** determines that the print job is currently being processed in accordance with step **504** of the print workflow **500**.

The controller **202** evaluates step **504** with values of the copied job properties stored in memory **210**. Step **504** executes a page count which determines, in this example, that the print job includes 11,000 pages. The 11,000 page count is added to the copied job properties stored in memory **210** (see e.g., element **550**).

After completion of the simulated execution of step **504**, the controller **202** determines that the print workflow **500** includes a conditional branch that routes print jobs to one of multiple possible paths (e.g., decision on whether to proceed to step **506** or alternative step **510**). The controller **202** evaluates the conditions of steps **506** and **510**. As seen in FIG. **6** (and discussed in more detail below), steps **506** and **510** have been configured with if/then/else logic, wherein print jobs are to proceed to step **506** if the print job format is Portable Document Format (PDF), otherwise the print job proceeds to step **510**. The controller **202** evaluates the conditions against the copied job properties, and determines to proceed to step **510** since the print job is in an AFP format.

Thus, the controller **202** has predicted a future step (e.g., step **510**) of the print job by processing copied job properties with step conditions in the print workflow. In this example, the predicted path and steps are indicated as such by bolded dashed lines. Next, the controller **202** evaluates step **510** which builds AFP data for the print job, and subsequently evaluates step **512**, which shifts printed images on the pages of the print job in accordance with administrator-set rules of step **512**. The controller **202** continues to follow the logical connections and evaluates step **514** which specifies the AFP resource library to use if the print job is to be converted to AFP for printing. For each predicted step that include conditions that serve to update or add job properties (e.g., step **512** and step **514**), the controller **202** changes or updates job properties (see e.g., **550**) in memory **210** accordingly before the next step is evaluated.

Next, the controller **202** evaluates conditions of the subsequent conditional branch, and determines to proceed to step **518** and print with Printer B since the print job includes more than 10,000 pages. The simulation continues to step **520**, evaluates step **520**, and then determines that no subsequent steps exist for the predicted path. The predicted path (e.g., bolded dashed lines) is displayed to the user via the GUI, along with potential steps in the print workflow **500** which are not predicted for the print job (e.g., non-bolded, dashed lines).

FIG. **6** illustrates a GUI for editing steps of a print workflow in an exemplary embodiment. Here, the GUI presents each of the steps **502-520** in the print workflow **500** and allows users to edit conditions, rules, and assigned durations to each step. In this example, step **510** is estimated to build AFP data in 20 seconds for each 1,000 kilobytes of a print job. However, a history of averaged statistical data may suggest step **510** typically performs in 30 seconds for each 1,000 kilobytes of a print job. The user may therefore select a step (e.g., see step **510** in FIG. **6**), and apply an appropriate change to the duration and/or unit(s) of duration accordingly. Alternatively or additionally, the controller **202** may update duration information for steps based on averaged historical data for certain customers or print workflows.

Since steps **502-520** in the print workflow have assigned durations, the controller **202** calculates a sum of each remain-

ing predicted step in the print workflow **500** to determine a total estimated completion time for the print job. The controller **202** therefore determines a duration value for steps **504**, **510**, **512**, **514**, **518**, and **520**, and displays the total to the user via the GUI. Alternatively or additionally, the total duration may be displayed on or near the predicted path of the print workflow **500**.

With knowledge of the predicted path and estimated time for the predicted path, a user may make a determination as to whether apply changes to the print job, print workflow, or certain steps within the print workflow. Moreover, the controller **202** enables a user to simulate any changes in memory **210** so that alternative paths may be predicted/estimated before such changes are applied to the print job that is to be or is being processed from the database **230**.

Processing systems herein (e.g., controller **202** and/or processor **220**) may be implemented, for example, as custom circuitry or a general purpose processor executing programmed instructions stored in an associated program memory, or some combination thereof. While workflow simulator **124** and print system control **128** are illustrated as independent elements, in some embodiments elements may be integrated in a print server at the print shop **100**. Embodiments disclosed herein can take the form of software, hardware, firmware, or various combinations thereof. In one particular embodiment, software is used to direct processing system(s) of the print server **120** to perform the various operations disclosed herein. FIG. **7** illustrates a processing system **700** configured to execute a computer readable medium embodying programmed instructions to perform desired functions in an exemplary embodiment. Processing system **700** is configured to perform the above operations by executing programmed instructions tangibly embodied on computer readable storage medium **712**. In this regard, embodiments of the invention can take the form of a computer program accessible via computer-readable medium **712** providing program code for use by a computer or any other instruction execution system. For the purposes of this description, computer readable storage medium **712** can be anything that can contain or store the program for use by the computer.

Computer readable storage medium **712** can be an electronic, magnetic, optical, electromagnetic, infrared, or semiconductor device. Examples of computer readable storage medium **712** include a solid state memory, a magnetic tape, a removable computer diskette, a random access memory (RAM), a read-only memory (ROM), a rigid magnetic disk, and an optical disk. Current examples of optical disks include compact disk-read only memory (CD-ROM), compact disk-read/write (CD-R/W), and DVD. Processing system **700**, being suitable for storing and/or executing the program code, includes at least one processor **702** coupled to program and data memory **704** through a system bus **750**. Program and data memory **704** can include local memory employed during actual execution of the program code, bulk storage, and cache memories that provide temporary storage of at least some program code and/or data in order to reduce the number of times the code and/or data are retrieved from bulk storage during execution.

Input/output or I/O devices **706** (including but not limited to keyboards, displays, pointing devices, etc.) can be coupled either directly or through intervening I/O controllers. Network adapter interfaces **708** may also be integrated with the system to enable processing system **700** to become coupled to other data processing systems or storage devices through intervening private or public networks. Modems, cable modems, SCSI, Fibre Channel, and Ethernet cards are just a few of the currently available types of network or host inter-

face adapters. Presentation device interface **710** may be integrated with the system to interface to one or more presentation devices, such as printing systems and displays for presentation of presentation data generated by processor **702**. Although specific embodiments were described herein, the scope of the inventive concept(s) is not limited to those specific embodiments. The scope of the inventive concept(s) is defined by the following claims and any equivalents thereof.

We claim:

1. A system comprising:

a controller configured to identify a print workflow that includes interconnected steps that perform processing tasks for print jobs, wherein at least one of the steps include conditional branching of multiple potential paths for print jobs through the print workflow;

the controller configured to identify a print job, to generate a copy of the print job, and to simulate an execution of a step in the print workflow with the copy of the print job, wherein the execution comprises:

determining whether the step includes conditional branching;

when the step includes conditional branching, predicting a subsequent step by evaluating conditions of the step against values of copied job properties of the print job; and

updating the copied job properties based on the execution of the step;

the controller configured to repeat the execution for each subsequently predicted step in the print workflow in order to predict a path of the print job in the print workflow; and

a graphical user interface (GUI) configured to display the path that is predicted for the print job in the print workflow.

2. The system of claim **1** wherein:

the controller is configured to calculate an estimated completion time for the print job based on an assigned duration value to each predicted step in the path of the print workflow; and

the GUI is configured to display the estimated completion near the path that is predicted for the print job.

3. The system of claim **1** wherein:

the controller is configured to determine whether the step includes impermissible values; and

the GUI is configured to display an error message that identifies the step with the impermissible values.

4. The system of claim **1** wherein:

the GUI is configured to receive input that indicates a change to the copied job properties; and

the controller is configured to predict a path for the print job in the print workflow based on the change to the copied job properties.

5. The system of claim **1** wherein:

the GUI is configured to receive input of a selected step in the print workflow, and to display paths of a plurality of print jobs predicted to reach the selected step.

6. The system of claim **1** wherein:

the controller configured to apply duration values to steps in the print workflow based on historical data of the print workflow, and to determine an estimated completion time for the print job based on the applied duration values of each predicted step in the path of the print workflow.

7. A method comprising:

identifying a print workflow that includes interconnected steps that perform processing tasks for print jobs, wherein at least one of the steps include conditional

branching of multiple potential paths for print jobs through the print workflow;

identifying a print job, to generate a copy of the print job, and to simulate an execution of a step in the print workflow with the copy of the print job, wherein the execution comprises:

determining whether the step includes conditional branching;

when the step includes conditional branching, predicting a subsequent step by evaluating conditions of the step against values of copied job properties of the print job; and

updating the copied job properties based on the execution of the step;

repeating the execution for each subsequently predicted step in the print workflow in order to predict a path of the print job in the print workflow; and

displaying the path that is predicted for the print job in the print workflow.

8. The method of claim **7** comprising:

calculating an estimated completion time for the print job based on an assigned duration value to each predicted step in the path of the print workflow; and

displaying the estimated completion near the path that is predicted for the print job.

9. The method of claim **7** wherein:

determining whether the step includes impermissible values; and

displaying an error message that identifies the step with the impermissible values.

10. The method of claim **7** comprising:

receiving input that indicates a change to the copied job properties; and

predicting a path for the print job in the print workflow based on the change to the copied job properties.

11. The method of claim **7** comprising:

receiving input of a selected step in the print workflow; and displaying paths of a plurality of print jobs predicted to reach the selected step.

12. The method of claim **7** comprising:

applying duration values to steps in the print workflow based on historical data of the print workflow; and

determining an estimated completion time for the print job based on the applied duration values of each predicted step in the path of the print workflow.

13. A non-transitory computer readable medium embodying programmed instructions which, when executed by a processor, are operable to perform a method comprising:

identifying a print workflow that includes interconnected steps that perform processing tasks for print jobs, wherein at least one of the steps include conditional branching of multiple potential paths for print jobs through the print workflow;

identifying a print job, to generate a copy of the print job, and to simulate an execution of a step in the print workflow with the copy of the print job, wherein the execution comprises:

determining whether the step includes conditional branching;

when the step includes conditional branching, predicting a subsequent step by evaluating conditions of the step against values of copied job properties of the print job; and

updating the copied job properties based on the execution of the step;

repeating the execution for each subsequently predicted step in the print workflow in order to predict a path of the print job in the print workflow; and displaying the path that is predicted for the print job in the print workflow. 5

14. The medium of claim 13 the method comprising: calculating an estimated completion time for the print job based on an assigned duration value to each predicted step in the path of the print workflow; and displaying the estimated completion near the path that is predicted for the print job. 10

15. The medium of claim 13 the method comprising: determining whether the step includes impermissible values; and displaying an error message that identifies the step with the impermissible values. 15

16. The medium of claim 13 the method comprising: receiving input that indicates a change to the copied job properties; and predicting a path for the print job in the print workflow based on the change to the copied job properties. 20

17. The medium of claim 13 the method comprising: receiving input of a selected step in the print workflow; and displaying paths of a plurality of print jobs predicted to reach the selected step. 25

18. The medium of claim 13 the method comprising: applying duration values to steps in the print workflow based on historical data of the print workflow; and determining an estimated completion time for the print job based on the applied duration values of each predicted step in the path of the print workflow. 30

* * * * *